DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 091 CE 070 706

AUTHOR	Hirsh, W.; And Others
TITLE	Careers in Organisations: Issues for the Future. Report 287.
INSTITUTION	Sussex Univ., Brighton (England). Inst. for Employment Studies.
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-85184-213-6
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	65p.; Study supported by the IES Co-operative Research Programme.
AVAILABLE FROM	BEBC Distribution, 15 Albion Close, Parkstone, Poole BH12 3LL, England, United Kingdom (25 British pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adjustment (to Environment); Adult Education; *Career Development; *Career Planning; *Employer Employee Relationship; *Employment Patterns; Foreign Countries; *Labor Force Development; *Organizational Change; Organizational Climate; Organizational Objectives; Organizations (Groups); Self Actualization; Synthesis; Trend Analysis; Work Environment; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	*United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Career issues facing individuals employed in organizations in the United Kingdom were examined in 12 1-day workshops that were attended by more than 150 individuals from 65 different organizations. The following career issues received particular attention: the career development environment; changes in organizational career management; the shift to self-development; roles/responsibilities in career development; developing an organizational strategy for careers; and unresolved issues/tensions in individuals' and organizations' career and labor force development objectives. The workshops made it clear that many of the United Kingdom's major employing organizations are in a state of career chaos. In many organizations, large-scale job losses and/or successive changes in organizational structure and skill requirements have erased career paths and even wiped out the notion of career development. For most of the work force, the rhetoric of development has never been stronger and real hope of serious career development opportunities have rarely been bleaker. Tensions were discovered between short- and longer-term goals and between individuals' career aspirations and organizations' goals. It was concluded that individuals must assume more personal responsibility for their career development and that organizations and employees must support each other's development goals. (Contains 14 references.) (MN)

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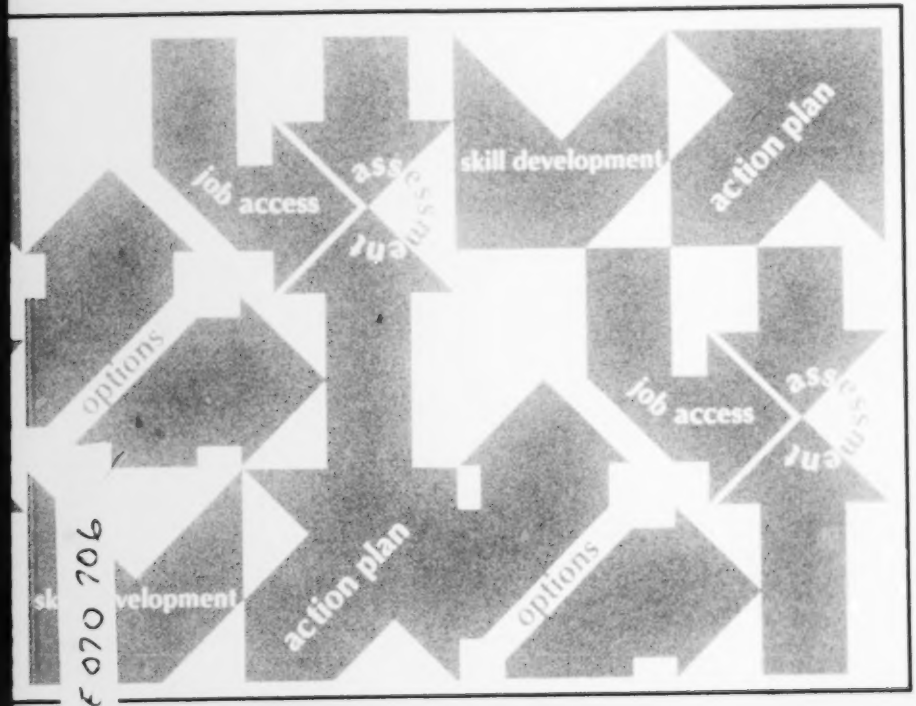
CAREERS IN ORGANISATIONS: ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

W Hirsh, C Jackson, C Jackson



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CAREERS IN ORGANISATIONS: ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

W Hirsh, C Jackson, C Jackson

THE INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES Report 287

A study supported by the IES Co-operative Research Programme

Published by:

THE INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES
Mantell Building
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9RF
UK

Tel. + 44 (0) 1273 686751
Fax + 44 (0) 1273 690430

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A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-85184-213-6

Printed in Great Britain by Microgen UK Ltd

The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, international centre of research and consultancy in human resource issues. It has close working contacts with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, professional and employee bodies, and foundations. Since it was established 25 years ago the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has a multidisciplinary staff of over 50. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, training and publications.

IES aims to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management. IES achieves this by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.

Formerly titled the Institute of Manpower Studies (IMS), the Institute changed its name to the *Institute for Employment Studies* (IES) in Autumn 1994, this name better reflecting the full range of the Institute's activities and involvement.

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Foreword

This paper is an exploration of some of the difficult issues facing employing organisations in dealing with the career development of their employees. It was born out of a sequence of events at which the authors discussed a number of these issues with individuals from subscribing organisations of the Institute. These eleven events — Career Development Forums — covering eight topics, were attended by over 140 people.

The discussion at these events was remarkably free and frank. In summarising some of it here we have preserved the spirit of these events by maintaining the anonymity of those from whom the ideas came. However, we would like to thank them all — both those who gave presentations and those who shared ideas in discussion.

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In Search of the Lost Career

~ voices from the workplace

A play created by Peter Herriot and Wendy Hirsh
and first performed at the
CBI Conference Centre, February 1994

Scene: fifth floor of business stream HQ in financial services sales function.

Characters:

Peter — head of section

Wendy — his boss; head of sales for this business stream

Charles — corporate management development manager

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P (*knocks on door twice, then bursts in, heated*) I'm not going to sign this thing you know . . . this whole appraisal thing's a complete sham. It says here we got to sign saying we've discussed my career together. Discussed my career . . . we didn't say one word about it!

W We ran out of time didn't we? We discussed your objectives for next year, and spent hours on that performance related pay.

P Objectives?! Who knows *what's* going to happen next year? And as for performance related pay . . . we go into mountains of paper work, and where does that get me? 2% if I've kept my nose clean!

I'm not criticising you *personally*, but all we've done so far is go through a paper exercise pre-occupied with money — that's all this organisation seems to care about these days: money!

Appraisal is supposed to be about *my* future too, you know. And I'm really worried about that. I need to know where I'm going. I need to talk about that — so come on, spare me the time to talk about it!

W Well, I know it's important . . . but you know how much else I've got on today. We've got the budget to agree next week, the sales planning meeting tomorrow . . . My main task now is to make sure we stay in profit. Otherwise you know we'll *both* be out in the cold — jobless.

P 'Bottom line, bottom line.' That's all anybody ever talks about round here . . . except for the Chairman on television last night. Did you *see* him? Pompous old git: 'People are our greatest asset.' People are our greatest asset . . . he doesn't really *believe* it does he? All these NVQs and lead bodies . . . It's all just advertising isn't it — all just for show.

Anyway, *you're my boss*. You're supposed to help me with my career. You're in a reasonable position. You're my boss and you're younger than me . . . so you must know how to get on round here. So how do you do it?

W *We...ell,* I think I came in at a lucky time. Entered on the general management graduate training programme — 'high flyers' they called us . . . Had quite a number of interesting jobs lined up for me. And there were plenty of opportunities for promotion then anyway. I was sent to the States for a couple of years. Spent a year in corporate planning. Helped with the Scottish merger. That chap at head office — Jim — talked to me about every six months and advised me on what they had in mind for me. All those moves led naturally to this job as head of department. I really don't think I had to do very much about my career . . . then.

But I don't think all that is still working now. The business has changed, the technology has changed, I don't even know if they want the same people now as they did when I came in.

P Well I know things are *changing* . . . that's all they ever say: 'things are changing'. But that's *their* problem, up in Corporate! *My* problem is here and now. I've always done my job . . . given them loyalty. I took that job move up north when they wanted me too, *and* moved back down to a house I can't afford. — But I reckon they've forgotten all that now.

Do you know how long I've been in this job? Nearly six, bloody, years. They probably don't even know I *exist*. They used to give me regular promotions. They don't do that any more, do they?

W I know that's rotten, but it couldn't go on the way it was could it? We both know it had to change. You know we had too many managers; too many costs. We've had to restructure; cut costs out of the system. Taking grades out — that's rungs off the ladder for people like you and me. Headcount down all round. That means we're all working twice as hard in the same job. Promotion seems rather a luxury doesn't it?

And then there's all this profit centre stuff . . . Breaking us up into business units, so they can see where money is being made — or lost. Cutting back at Corporate HQ, and in overhead functions, like personnel. I think that means hardly anyone left in corporate personnel. Certainly not the people to manage our careers for us. We're going to have to manage our own careers in the future.

P What *crap*! What about Stan in marketing? He's had two moves while I've been in this one job. Why? — I mean *why*? Is he supposed to be better than me? I suppose I'm just supposed to be grateful that I've still got a job! That makes me *really* fed up. Some people have got careers — but I'm not one of them. There must another job for me somewhere in this cess pit . . . or is everyone over thirty five dead wood and a burnt out case? Come on! You're my *manager* — don't just offer me platitudes!

W OK, OK let's leave the budget for a few minutes. I can hear you're really angry. You tell me then, Peter. *What is it that you want*?

P (*becomes reflective*) What do I *want*? Well, what *would* be nice is some sort of recognition, for starters. Some recognition for what I've given — and not just in the past. I haven't copped out. I'm still working very hard for this organisation. I'm still on the ball. But until recently I knew where I stood, and they knew too, and periodically I was promoted. But now there's no more promotion, the pay system's a joke — so how do you know you're recognised for what you're giving? I don't think you are. So the first thing I'd like is just a *little bit of recognition*.

Hmmm . . . what else? Let's think . . .

Come to think of it, I wouldn't mind just a little bit of security. I mean there's the mortgage still. The kids at college — you have to pay the whole lot now. And yet I could get a

month's notice tomorrow. Jim did you know — old Jim in personnel. To tell the truth I think they've forgotten I exist, and if they do remember me, than I'm probably for the chop.

W I know how you feel. To be honest, I think we all feel the same now. It's hard times for all of us at the moment, and I don't think *anybody* knows where they are going in this company at the moment. Certainly at my level we're no better off. People have even stopped discussing it. They find it too depressing. And they're worried about what they should or shouldn't say.

P Yes; it's all hole in the corner stuff at the moment.

W It gets like that when times are hard. But seriously now, if you and I both feel this career business needs a real re-think round here — . What would *really* make a difference to you in terms of your own future in this company?

P Well, I'll tell you one thing. I haven't the faintest idea what this organisation's so called business strategy is. I mean, it *would* be nice to have just a *little bit of advance warning* about what may be happening? So I suppose that would make a bit of difference. Just a little less uncertainty. All these corporate planners and people; there must be something going on about strategy . . . and we should know about it.

Now; what else? A second thing is — I'm prepared to take on board that I may not have a job for life with this lot. But if I haven't, then I need to be employable somewhere else. So, is the organisation going to develop me enough to make me employable outside? I've lost my technical expertise since I've been a manager — it's gone out of date. So who's going to employ me? Some sense of employability outside; that would make a difference.

W Yes, I worry about that one too. After all, that fast track didn't build on my degree in engineering! Being a manager in a finance company has hardly developed my technical skills.

P Well, well — an engineer! Who would of thought it?

W And being a so-called 'senior manager' isn't going to ensure my employability. The country is teeming with unemployable senior managers.

P And a third thing: I'm bored. I've done my job for six years. It would be OK if there was some variety in the job — or if I could develop it along my own lines. Or even if they would move me around a bit — not even necessarily promotion — just any move.

So those are the kinds of things which would make a difference to me. It doesn't seem *too* much to ask does it? Surely they can do it?

W Well, they say they can't. And I certainly can't. I think we're all in the same boat now. I think that the days are gone when organisations sorted these career things out for you. I think that's what the Chairman meant when he talked about this 'self-development' stuff on the telly.

P Wendy! For goodness sake! I thought you were a realist? That's just jargon. What does that *mean*? I think they are just copping out completely.

W Yes; I think that's probably just what it means.

P But think. If I'm going to develop myself, how do I know what jobs there are going to be? How do I know when they are going to be available? How do I know what skills they are going to need? How do I know whether I've got them? How do I know where I can get them from? How can I get them when I've got no time to spend with the family, let alone developing my skills? Come on, you tell me! How am I supposed to develop myself when I can't find out anything at all?

W Do you think I would have been stuck here for the last four years, if I could solve these problems any better than you? I've said Peter: I think we're both in the same boat here. I'd still like a more senior job. I'm not over the hill yet! I think I can offer more too. But I'm blowed if I know how to get that message across.

Oh look, here comes old Charles. He's in what left of Corporate Personnel isn't he? In fact I think he *is* Corporate Personnel! He's an old mate of mine; let's ask him what he's doing about all this career stuff.

Charles! Over here for a minute, and help us will you?

C (*breezily*) I can't stay for long. I'm just on my way to the annual swap shop.

P Swap shop?! What's that? Personnel's version of a car boot sale?

C Not exactly. Don't you know about it? It's where the senior managers sit down and discuss very carefully the people they think might be earmarked for the board — and discuss their career moves.

P Typical! Bloody typical! They're only concerned with reproducing themselves in their own divine images. What about the likes of us two? Come on Charles, what are you doing for us?

C Well; that depends, Peter, on what you're prepared to do for yourself.

W Come on Charles, we're both willing to develop, but we can't operate in a *vacuum*. Peter has just been giving me an earful about this self-development stuff and we think we've got some real problems with it.

For a start, we don't know where the opportunities will be. We don't know what skills they will need. We don't know whether we've got those skills because no-one will tell us honestly what they think of us . . . and really, we don't even know where we want to go. All we know is that we're really fed up. We feel stuck. We're bored. And we want some real help.

P Good Lord Wendy! — You *were* listening to what I said. That must be a first!

W First time for everything. But maybe it rang bells with me too.

P Come on Charles! Let's have some answers.

C Hang on a minute. I've got problems too, you know. I'm supposed to be supporting the business strategy (except that I can't find out what it is). If I don't do that I'm for the chop. I have to help the Board achieve their vision. — Except when it comes to people development I'm not sure they've got any real vision. They use all the right words: did you see the Chairman on telly last night? But I don't think they really understand the implications of what they are saying. Anyway, they do want to go on with the swap shop.

At least they've realised that if they all went under the proverbial bus tomorrow, they need some chaps who can take over.

W Chance would be a fine thing! But *come on* Charles, you know the company isn't just the Board. It's people like us too. And you Corporate types don't seem to know much about what life is like at the sharp end. For example, how long do you think Peter here has been in the same job?

C Two years?

P Going on six, Charles . . . And how do you think that makes *me* feel when others are still getting promoted?

C Well I'm sorry about that, but we've passed all that stuff out to the line now. It's your boss here who has got to help you with your career development. Corporate Personnel really has no remit to interfere with individuals' careers any more.

P You must be joking! My *boss*? She knows next to nothing about my career possibilities! Indeed, she doesn't seem to know how to manage her own career, let alone mine. And anyway I'm too useful to her here. She may not want to help me to move. If I go, she probably won't achieve her budget targets.

C Well, we've got some thoughts on where we're going on all of this. No promises, mind. We know managers won't develop their people unless it helps the business too, so we're going to start working with each of the businesses to examine how changes in products and markets are going to affect jobs and skills.

P Well that's fine and dandy for the business — but what about us? How are we supposed to develop ourselves? And don't spout on about competences either. I'm fed up with bloody competences!

C Well, for a start I've been looking at another part of our business where they have been experimenting with development centres.

P *More* jargon. Translate please.

C A short event — maybe a couple of days — which will give you the chance to really assess your skills and learn more about how they match up to the future of the business as we see it. It will also help you to have a think about what you really *do* want out of your career.

W Oh good! So someone really is going to do it for us after all.

C Not at all. After the workshop, the two of you together will have to look carefully at what Peter does about what he has learned. This may mean taking another look at his job. It may mean looking out for sideways moves, secondments — any number of things.

W But supposing Peter does want a move? How does all this help him get a different job?

C We are also looking at what happens when there is a job vacancy, or a new project team is being set up. In future you will be able to see such vacancies on our electronic notice board, and a contact name to find out more about it.

P Even if you do manage to get those secretive bastards to enter this new dawn of enlightenment, I can't see that development centres and open job ads are going to meet

everyone's needs. What about the people who can't talk to their manager, or whose manager blocks them, or who don't want to bare their souls at a development centre?

C Yes, we know there's an awfully long way to go, and this is only the start. Some companies are developing whole ranges of approaches. They may include:

mentoring — sorry! Jargon again — someone to advise you on your career who isn't your boss

learning resource centres — somewhere you can go to get information and self-study materials

the idea of a *personal development plan* — where you can record your own development goals

P Oh *God*! So now we have to write our own career plans down, because no-one else has the foggiest idea how to!

C We are planning to change the appraisal system too. Staff development will be one of the things managers themselves will be judged on. And we are going to introduce a development review — separate from the performance appraisal — as an occasion to talk through development issues with your boss, without short-term objectives and performance pay dominating the discussion.

P Well, some of those things may be helpful, but it all seems to be plans at present. How long is it going to take before we really see any change here? It seems so very far from where we are now.

C Some things you will see soon: the job ads — and a pilot development centre this summer. Other things will take longer to get under way. I reckon the senior managers may take several years to get to accept all these new ways of doing things. They know the old systems don't work any more, but they won't want to be really frank about careers either. That's my job I suppose, to get them to open up.

W What can people at my kind of level do to make sure this doesn't fizzle out? We've heard the platitudes before.

C I know what I need you to do. First, to make a good loud noise that this development stuff really *is* just as important as this year's bottom line. If people like you two go around saying the bottom line is the only thing that matters, it lets senior managers off the hook.

Second, to give some of these new ideas a try. If take-up and feedback is positive, we may stand some chance of moving at a reasonable pace.

P Well; I'm going to move at a reasonable pace to the pub now. Anyone joining me?

1. Introduction

The concept of the 'career', and the idea that organisations and communities develop skills in their employees or members through an accumulation of experience, are ancient ideas. In the twentieth century these ideas evolved into complex processes in large companies and public sector organisations. Yet now they seem to be in a state of flux. Many large organisations seem to have lost their nerve when it comes to developing their people for the future. As the rhetoric about development for the future has become stronger, so the processes for actually doing it have crumbled away.

Seeing these issues in a wide range of employing organisations, there are obvious differences depending on the sector, history and circumstances of the organisation. However, the similarities seem more striking than the differences. The pressures on 'careers' and 'career development' seem to have common themes, as do the resultant questions about whether 'careers' still exist and if so in what form. Some common responses are also seen. Sadly, there are also always fashions in personnel or 'human resource management' (itself a fashion) some of which may be appropriate responses to current circumstances and some of which seem merely to make matters worse.

The purpose of this paper is to set out some of the common pressures, issues and responses prevalent at the time of writing, in large employing organisations in the UK. In doing so we do not pretend to have simple answers to profound questions. The more modest aims of this paper are:

- to stimulate debate by mapping some of the main career development issues concerning employing organisations
- to assist practitioners and managers by pointing to current trends in policy and practice
- to pass on lessons learnt in some organisations, to those working in others.

1.1 A continuing dialogue

This report has been born out of many conversations over several years. Some of these conversations have been with clients of IES. Some of the most memorable have been with employees outside the HR function, either in the course of

research studies or consultancy assignments. Such conversations remind us daily of how central the issues of career and development have become to individuals in our society.

The report has also been shaped by a series of one day forums on career development IES ran for its subscriber organisations. These events have been designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas and sharing of information on current issues in career development practice. They have provided an opportunity for the participants, usually HR professionals from the IES subscriber organisations, to discuss how they are responding to current challenges.

The topics for these forums were decided in consultation with IES subscribers, who were asked to vote on a list of possible topics provided by IES. Over the last three years we ran a total of twelve events on the following nine topics:

- Key issues in career development
- The line manager's role in career development
- Implementing a self-development approach to career planning
- Succession planning
- Career development strategy
- Personal development plans
- Facilitating cross-functional and lateral career moves
- Assessing potential
- Career development in decentralised organisations.

Each event was limited to 16 participants, to maximise the opportunity for each to contribute on the day. The forums were led by Wendy Hirsh and Charles Jackson but, in addition, at nearly all the forums individuals presented organisational case studies. There were usually one or two case studies presented at each forum and these provided valuable insight into the way organisations are tackling career development issues. In total, nearly 150 participants attended these forums, although a number of these individuals attended more than one event.

1.2 A word on words

The area of career development is fraught with problems of vocabulary. Before we get into this deep water, a few ground rules might help:

- 'Career' in this report does not imply something going upwards (it may go outwards or sideways or in other directions). Neither does it imply something which is necessarily planned.

- 'Development' includes all the things we learn from our experiences as well as from courses and other training activities.
- The term 'career management' will be used here to convey the things organisations do to try and develop employees in line with business needs.
- 'Career development' will be defined more widely to include also the things people do for themselves as well as those that are done to them.

1.3 Issues in career development

The issues in career development we examine range from the philosophical to the very practical. This report covers the following areas:

The career development environment

The very term 'career' has become problematic. What did it used to mean? What is happening outside and inside employing organisations to make us feel it should be redefined? What might 'careers' become, and what does this say about how organisations should redefine and redirect career development? What does it also say about how individuals will see their 'careers' and the place of development in the employment relationship?

Changes in organisational career management

At the level of practice, there have been fairly well defined 'career paths' in many organisations. There have also been accepted ways of 'managing' the career experience and training of individuals inside large organisations, to meet current and future business needs. As the environment changes, established career paths no longer seem appropriate and resourcing patterns are hard to see. Can we 'manage' careers at all if we don't know what kinds of jobs we will have? What is happening to career management processes at present? Are the current responses appropriate? How do they fit with other current changes in personnel policy and management practice?

The shift to self-development

One particular response has been to exhort individuals to take responsibility for their own careers and development. Is this just organisations passing the buck? If not, what are the real business rationales for self-development? What do individuals need to become effective self-developers? How are organisations supporting this move? What issues does it raise about the relationship between individual development and organisational needs?

Roles and responsibilities

As large organisations have become increasingly fragmented, career development has been largely devolved away from the corporate centre. What are the consequences of this devolution? Is it possible in career development to get the benefits both of a corporate approach and of responsiveness to local and individual needs?

In delivering career development, what are respective roles of the individual, the line manager, the personnel function, and 'others' (peers, friends, mentors, counsellors *etc.*)?

Strategy and tactics

Organisations speak of 'career development strategies', and personnel specialists write Board papers about them. What do we mean by the term 'strategy' in relation to this subject? How can organisations set about defining their strategies? What different tactical approaches can be taken to changing policy and practice in this area?

Unresolved issues

The paper ends by highlighting some of the main tensions and unresolved issues in career development. These include issues of career paths and new skills; safeguarding the medium term; tensions between organisations and individuals; and how to facilitate development for the many, not just the select few.

2. The Career Development Environment

The idea of a 'career' has been central to how we think and talk about our own and other people's working lives. Conscious management of careers within employing organisations has also been an important part of personnel management. Yet we are now told that careers are a thing of the past, we should not expect to have a career, and our organisations can no longer promise them to us.

We therefore start by looking at the ideas of career and development, why established notions of career are coming under pressure, and how individuals and organisations might respond.

2.1 What is a career?

A career is most simply thought of as the sequence of work experiences which individuals have over their working lives.

For some, who have worked in large, highly structured organisations, the career has appeared as an orderly progression up a hierarchy. This has been especially so for managers and professionals. For such employees, the expectation has been that the giving of loyalty and flexibility would be rewarded by security, and the opportunity to move through jobs of increasing responsibility, skill, status and reward. This picture of the career in terms of 'onwards and upwards' has been central to corporate life in the post-war period.

Such careers were also 'managed' by large organisations through fairly well-understood and often elaborate processes, including promotion boards, distinct career streams and succession plans.

However, we should remind ourselves that for most people careers have never been like this. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers have usually achieved their maximum earnings quite early in working life, after relatively few career steps. The same is true for many employed in clerical and secretarial jobs. For such workers, the 'career' consists of rather few upward moves and many sideways moves, within the same organisation or between employers. For the self-employed — an increasingly important group — the notion of 'career' is better thought of as a

series of work assignments. We already talk about the careers of actors, musicians and writers in this way.

So careers are — and have always been — varied in nature. They have contained lateral moves and moves between employers, as well as upward moves. For many — especially women — they have also contained periods of unpaid work or of part-time employment. However, the idea of the organisational career is still a powerful one, but seems to be in a state of flux.

2.2 Pressures on the 'career'

There are many factors leading to a loss of faith in the idea of the organisational or corporate career. Some of these come from the context in which organisations operate, some from the way they have changed internally, some from important changes going on in society at large. Some of the main pressures will briefly be listed here.

First and foremost, security and promotion — the 'reward' side of the 'career' bargain — are being delivered less frequently. With slower or erratic growth, promotion opportunities have become more restricted and unpredictable in most large organisations. In the 1980s the idea was put forward that the 'core' workforce of a large organisation would still have a high degree of employment security. More recently, with draconian restructuring and 'downsizing', belief in employment security has evaporated. The common perception is that no job is 'safe', and indeed many organisations have told their employees that they can 'no longer expect a career for life'.

Successive rounds of restructuring have also swept away established career paths. It is difficult to pursue a career, if you do not know where you are going, even as a rough direction.

At the same time, the business and political environment in the UK has become notoriously short-term. Mergers, liquidations and restructurings are frequent, rapid and far reaching in their impact on employees. These rapid and largely unforeseen changes in demand for staff leave both organisations and individuals lacking the confidence to plan for the future. In other organisations it is the rate of change in technology, markets or products which make for a feeling of turbulence.

The decentralisation of large organisations into smaller business units has built high barriers to movement between areas of work. This is the case even where people are still notionally working for the same organisation. This trend is particularly apparent in the public and recently privatised sectors. Again the rhetoric of flexibility and lateral movement is at odds with what is happening on the ground.

This decentralisation, coupled with the passing of responsibility for career development from the HR function (now itself fragmented) to line managers, has also led in many cases to the collapse of the old systems for managing job moves and development. This can leave a policy and process vacuum in which no-one knows how to make proactive development happen.

Meanwhile, the external labour market is becoming more complex and diverse. For some people, careers will be increasingly international. For many they will take place outside conventional organisations, especially as sub-contractors or as self-employed. Many professionals will be 'boundary-less': working flexibly across organisations. How are these individuals going to access development?

As education and training structures become more flexible, mid-life changes in working direction should become easier. The notion of the 'right age' at which to achieve a certain career goal must surely lose its meaning, although large organisations find this very difficult to deal with. Older workers are too often seen as not worth developing.

Wider societal changes will also make it less likely that employees will offer the unconditional compliance which used to be their side of the career bargain. Individuals expect increasingly to make choices about work, and their lives outside work. The increasing participation of women in the workforce is having very far reaching effects both on their own behaviour (needing more flexible models of career) and on the behaviour of their partners (who now have more factors to consider in taking their own employment decisions).

These pressures are only a few selected from many. They serve to illustrate that notions of career and development are being affected by a complex web of change. Some of these pressures may be temporary or reversible (*eg* currently fashionable organisational structures). Others, such as the need for flexibility, and more diversity within the labour market and workforce, seem less likely to go away.

2.3 Do we still need 'careers'?

'We don't have careers any more, do we?'

One response to such pressures might be to jettison the whole idea of 'career' as out of date and irrelevant. Before we do this, we should pause to consider why the idea of 'career' became so important to individuals and organisations.

For employing organisations, the career has been the means of producing high level or specialised skills which they can never be sure of recruiting from outside. Some corporations claim that their only real competitive edge is the quality of the management which they grow internally through individuals'

careers. The internal development of people through career experiences and training, develops a strong corporate culture. Effective career management processes also enable people to move from one job type to another, thereby increasing flexibility and reducing redundancy, recruitment and training costs.

Strangely, for organisations, the less the idea of the 'job' makes sense (as a relatively stable definition of work role), the more important the idea of 'career' will become (as an accumulation of skills, knowledge and experience).

For individuals the 'career' is a way of thinking about their past and their future. In industrial societies, where work and career largely define identity, it expresses who they are. It has given some people access to increasing rewards over their working lives, and a sense — maybe misplaced — of security and control. It has provided a sense of progression or forward momentum in terms of skill development and personal growth. This applies even when progression in terms of grade and money disappears.

Even if careers are becoming more complex and unpredictable, the basic needs of employing organisations (to increase the value of their employees through skill development) and individuals (for identity and a sense of development through time) remain crucial.

2.4 A new deal?

If we still need careers but the old corporate career is too inflexible a model, then what might a new model look like? The notion of a *psychological contract* between employer and employee might be a helpful start. Argyris called it a *'set of mutually agreed expectations'* between the individual and the organisation. An organisational career can then be seen as the *'sequence of renegotiations of the psychological contract which the individual and the organisation conduct during his or her period of employment'*, (Herriot, 1992).

If we start to see the career in this way, then we can begin to address what the parties will be seeking from it.

On their side of the career bargain, employing organisations will be asking their employees for:

- strong identification with the goals of the business
- flexibility to switch to new roles or tasks
- ability and willingness to retrain
- ability to find a job elsewhere if no longer needed.

So, as one Forum participant put it:

'companies are looking for highly committed, totally flexible and completely disposable employees.'

'We need your commitment today . . . but maybe we will not need you at all tomorrow'

Put this way, there are some obvious tensions, and clearly some balances to be struck. Individuals will need to take more responsibility for their own careers as their organisations take less. They will be seeking:

- employability through continuing development
- choice in career paths, jobs and roles
- the ability to plan for their financial security
- choice in their life/work balance
- information about job options
- processes which allow real negotiation.

So for individuals, taking charge of their own careers is likely to mean they will be looking for more varied types of career which meet their own individual needs and aspirations. Large organisations, accustomed to the old model of the corporate career, need to learn to deal with this form of diversity.

Some see the notion of 'ensuring employability' as replacing promotion and job security at the heart of the new employment relationship (Kanter, 1989). Others see a 'jobbing' labour market in which organisations only hire and reward for the task (Bridges, 1994) and have no great interest in skill development — until, that is, they start to face skill shortages.

2.5 New needs for development

If, as we propose here, changes in the nature of 'career' go hand in hand with changes in the nature of the employment relationship, then our idea of 'development' also needs to change.

There is much debate about what changing business and labour market conditions imply for the skills people will have to develop. However, at the general level, individuals are receiving a very confusing message. On the one hand it would appear that the emerging labour market will hire them for exactly what they do (usually something they have done before) and will value highly task specific forms of training and development (hence NVQs). On the other hand, in such a fast changing environment the key to success will lie in broader knowledge and understanding, generic skills, personal attributes, and the ability to learn new skills.

Our education and training structures are wrestling with this tension. So as individuals we need to be redefining 'development' not just as the skills for our current job, or next job, but much more broadly. Organisations also will have a hard

time balancing their overriding imperative for high skill performance on current tasks, against investment in broader forms of development, which will buy them the medium term flexibility they say they will need.

3. Changes in Organisational Career Management

Many organisations are re-thinking their approach to career development in the context of these changes and tensions. Some see that long established processes need to be re-examined in the light of changing business needs. Others are looking for completely fresh approaches. Some are already quite a long way down the road, and we can learn a great deal from their experience by looking at what practical changes they are making.

Many initiatives are aimed at helping individuals take charge of their own careers and development. These approaches are the subject of Chapter 4.

Some organisations are also much more careful and skilful than others in managing the change from their old approaches to careers and development to newer approaches. The process of change management is the subject of Chapter 6, but worth mentioning here also. In an alarming number of major organisations, including many considered 'leading edge', there seems to be a real vacuum in the processes for moving from one job to another and in anticipating development needs. The old processes have fallen into disuse and been replaced with rhetoric but no clear processes. There is nothing more alarming for the employee, or disabling for the organisation, at a time of rapid change. Mayo (1991) emphasises, from personal experience in ICL, the need for managed change from the old to the new.

3.1 What are career management processes?

Before looking at how career management and development processes are changing, we should identify some of the processes used by organisations to manage careers and development.

- Before it can start managing careers, an organisation needs to have a sense of what kinds of people it is seeking to develop. This is obvious, but there are real problems in articulating skill needs, resourcing strategies and career paths.
- Succession planning and so-called 'fast track' or 'high potential' schemes have been clear mechanisms for managing

both the careers and development of selected groups of employees.

- For some other groups, at some career stages, particular 'schemes' or 'programmes' have been set up to deliver skill development. These often integrate training with parallel work experience and are designed to meet specific organisational objectives (*eg* graduate entry schemes, middle manager development programmes *etc.*).
- For most other people, 'careers' are the by-product of conventions (often implicit) concerning career paths and the processes of job filling. The job filling process is not normally seen as a career development process but, of course, is the one which really counts.
- For those outside special 'schemes', most development is still as a result of job experience, although it is not necessarily planned. Most formal training will be related to the current job and may not be seen in the context of the individual's wider development.
- Assessment processes can support career management by supplying information on skills, 'potential', training needs and, sometimes, career aspirations. Different types of assessment process make different assumptions about the use of such information and its ownership.
- Computerised information systems may also underpin career management processes.

In this section we will look at the ways in which some of these processes are adjusting to the changing careers environment.

3.2 Articulating business needs

'We know the kinds of people we are looking for'

Specialist and general management paths

In the past, career management was based on fairly simple views of the kinds of people the organisation needed, the skills they required and how these people could be developed. Many careers were based on the gradual acquisition of technical or functional knowledge and experience, obtained through formal training and movement up a functional hierarchy of jobs. These functional hierarchies were echoed in the organisational structure, working practices, and pay and grading systems.

In the 1970s and 1980s many large organisations invested heavily in developing 'the general manager'. These godly creatures transcended the old functional careers and had to know about everything. Their development was aimed at giving breadth of experience and their careers zig-zagged across functions, units and countries.

The current business environment raises questions about both the functional and the general management models. Organisations still need specialists — in fact in a global market many organisations find themselves competing to a large extent on their specialist expertise. However, those with particular expertise now work across functional and organisational boundaries. This has had the side effect of fragmenting their career paths and the ownership of their specialist development.

The 'general manager' model also has some downsides. Too many radical moves left some 'high flyers' without any solid knowledge base. They were also very expensive to develop, especially if their development included frequent international moves. This kind of career path is also problematic for dual career couples or those who aspire to any kind of stable life outside work (Hirsh, 1992).

Organisations are also trying to re-align career management with future business needs but are often doing so in a short-term culture. They are struggling to bridge the gap between broad business needs and the specific adjustments needed by individuals. This gap is particularly acute in areas of specialism where skills may take many years to develop. The fickleness of organisational demands placed on such individuals can contrast sharply with the long years it has taken them to develop their specialist expertise.

The emerging model is unclear, but it seems to blur the 'specialist' versus 'generalist' divide. General managers will grow out of a functional career base. They will still need broader career experience than most, but may not change job or location so frequently as at the height of the 'fast track' boom.

New functions, new job groups

The future equivalent of business 'functions' may not be expressed in the same language as in the past. Some newer business activities emerge which need grafting onto the existing language of job groups and career paths. An obvious example is IT, a function which will not stay still long enough for simple ways of talking about IT jobs to emerge. This has led to no end of trouble for organisations in resourcing IT roles and developing IT skills.

Even more challenging, however, are new functions which seem to be new ways of perceiving established business activities. As customer service and support become key business activities, where do they sit? With sales, because they are do to with the customer interface? With quality? With technical development? The answers depend on the organisation of course. But major companies are having to rethink seriously how they see their key activities. This will affect careers and development just as much as it will influence organisational structure. Some are

using the concept of 'business capability' to do this: defining activities and/or skill sets which are central to business success.

The need to redefine job groups, skills and paths is real and pressing. The best of way of doing so is not yet established. We must also expect that these job groups, skill needs and career paths will not be static. That is a serious reason for keeping them broad and simple and linking them to the main things the organisation has to be good at doing. In the meantime, a lack of clarity about future key job roles presents very real barriers to either organisations or individuals managing career development effectively.

Competences — the magic solution?

A veritable competence industry has been busy in large UK organisations. It is redefining — in behavioural terms — what various groups of employees need to have, or to be, to achieve high performance in their jobs: the very jobs which are continuously being changed, invented and destroyed.

Competence frameworks do appear to have the potential to help underpin career management and development. However, there is a danger that they may become just another way of cloning (like the bad old fast tracks), or reach an unworkable level of detail and bureaucracy (like bad old job descriptions).

To be useful in career development, they need to address both general skills (personal and managerial) and skills associated with particular work activities (technical, functional, and specialist). Very few organisations have got to grips with both.

We also need to take care that 'top down' views of organisational capability mesh with 'bottom up' views of competence in particular job roles. Competence frameworks also only have real benefit if they are clearly disseminated throughout the organisation. There are many competence frameworks which have cost a fortune to develop but have never been properly explained to those who should be using them.

Resourcing internally and externally

Organisations now have diverse patterns of meeting their skill needs. They continue to develop from within. They recruit at many levels and into most types of work, often as a deliberate way of bringing in new ideas. They meet other needs by using contract staff, sub-contractor companies, agencies *etc.*

Career management processes are part of this wider resourcing strategy but often seem to take little account of the wide range of people entering or working alongside the organisation at different levels and career stages.

3.3 Planning for the few: succession and fast tracks

In many large organisations succession planning has been the most highly developed aspect of career management. Succession planning has been seen as a way of managing the careers of key individuals to meet future business needs. Succession plans have usually been confined to general management positions, their incumbents and possible successors.

Towards more flexible pools

During the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of succession was often linked with idea of a 'fast track' group of employees, identified quite early in career (mid to late twenties) as having 'high potential'. The careers of this group were then centrally managed to groom them for senior management (Hirsh, 1990). This approach does not fit the career environment of the 1990s. Its central assumption — that senior managers can be spotted many years ahead and moved through a planned sequence of jobs — does not fit with the reality of business uncertainty.

Many organisations are adapting their succession planning by replacing the idea of developing individuals for particular posts with the more flexible concept of developing 'pools' of well skilled people for job groups at various levels in the organisation.

A more open process

The processes for generating succession and career plans have become less secret, with senior managers sharing and agreeing plans, often in career development 'committees' or 'forums'. One of the main outcomes of succession planning, which is difficult to achieve in any other way, has been the facilitation of small numbers of quite radical career moves across functional or business stream boundaries. The use of committees to agree such moves in principle; certainly seems to make it more likely that they will happen in practice.

In some organisations, succession has also become a more open process involving 'high potential' employees directly in their own career planning, although this is still a difficult area. A useful compromise seems to be to maintain a dialogue about career direction and options without seeming to 'promise' a particular post which it may not be possible to deliver. At the point where particular vacancies are being considered, individuals should be consulted again. This avoids the embarrassing situation of an individual being offered the planned job and turning it down.

Increasing objectivity

Objectivity is increased through improved evidence of performance and potential against clearer criteria. Computerised databases are one way of holding summary information on individuals, which is examined during succession discussions.

The 'crown prince syndrome' is being tackled by later identification of 'high potential', wider candidate trawl, freer movement into and out of the population receiving special attention, and increasing use of open internal vacancy systems to attract other candidates.

Devolved succession and individual development planning

Some organisations are extending the principles of succession planning to planning development for individuals lower down the organisation. Managers of business streams or units review in a systematic way the people available to cover various types of post and their development needs. This is not managed from the corporate centre, but more locally. The result can be proactive development of individuals through both work experience and training throughout their careers. In this devolved form of succession planning, care needs to be taken in managing the information flow between the managers who are looking at different, but often overlapping, populations of employees. It seems a useful model to aim for, but needs good resourcing and information systems at local level to have real impact. Few organisations have really implemented this model, although many more espouse it in theory.

3.4 Schemes and frameworks

If succession planning has only looked at the top and high flyers, how have organisations managed the careers of everyone else? For some, the model of a 'scheme' or development 'programme' has been a very visible process.

Entry schemes have been, and are still, a helpful way of ensuring skill development and varied work experience early in a career. With more flexible career structures and devolved responsibility for resourcing and development, schemes have become more tailored to local business needs. With more involvement of individuals in their own career development (see Chapter 4) and a 'just in time' view of training, schemes have also become far more tailored to the particular needs of the individuals they cover. One way of achieving this flexibility within a scheme is by having agreed guidelines (corporate, functional or divisional) for the skill development and work experience which should be available to the individual, but allowing for local decisions in the timing, sequence and method of delivery.

Schemes do not have to be restricted to new entrants or to graduate recruits. They can be a useful device for managing other periods of significant career transition, for example the move into a first managerial role.

3.5 Job filling processes

If you are neither a high flyer, nor on a scheme, then by what processes does the organisation 'manage' your career? The simplistic answer to this is: 'it doesn't'.

In the past, large organisations did manage the careers of most of their employees in fairly predictable ways through:

- the usually clear, often functional, career ladders we have already described
- structured promotion processes (*eg* promotion boards)
- quite centralised job filling or 'posting' functions, often managed by the personnel department
- redeployment processes in periods of restructuring.

As we have already seen, career paths are now harder to see. The processes by which vacancies are filled have also changed considerably. These changes include:

- a shift from the organisation looking for internal candidates towards individuals applying for internal vacancies themselves
- an accompanying increase in 'open internal job advertisement', even at more senior levels (although rarely for the very top jobs). Our forum participants had found, however, that vacancy systems tend to be partial in coverage and are open to abuse from managers who may choose not to communicate all vacancies
- decisions being taken by the line manager who 'owns' the vacancy, on who to appoint
- various attempts to make this line manager selection process more objective, including 'competence based selection' as one of the newest.

The result of these changes is somewhat ironic. At a time when organisations are saying they want a more flexible workforce, internal vacancies could be used to increase this flexibility by broadening individuals' work experiences. However, the understandable desire from hard pressed line managers is to get the 'best person for the job'. Arguments based on equity and competence point the same way. This leads to a job-focused rather than a development-focused use of the internal labour market. The Catch 22 for the employee is obvious:

'Yes you can apply for this job, but you won't get it unless you can prove you already have all the skills to do it.'

3.6 Lateral moves

'We can't offer promotion, but will encourage lateral moves'

One particular aspect of career development which is in vogue is the 'lateral' move: a step at the same level to a different job, function or work area. This was such a hot topic for the Career Development Forum participants that a whole event was focused just on this issue.

It showed that we need to disentangle different reasons for making lateral moves including:

- planned moves to develop breadth of skill in potential senior managers, as in the classic 'fast track'
- planned exposure to other areas of work to broaden the understanding which employees have of other parts of the business
- their part in induction and early training (*eg* on graduate programmes)
- their role as an alternative to promotion, either to add new skills (to improve future chances), to offer job variety, or just in the hope of avoiding total frustration.

The debate also revealed just how difficult it is to make lateral moves happen. A successful lateral move requires two willing managers and a willing employee. This rarely comes about by chance. In particular, lateral moves require:

- realism. It is possible to retain confidence and credibility in moving between functions in the same part of the business, or across business streams within the same function. Do not expect people to move across both at once.
- a climate in which both managers and individuals are able to risk the temporary reduction in performance which lateral movement often implies.
- the manager 'giving up' an individual being confident they will get a satisfactory replacement. A trade in poor performing lateral movers is clearly fatal.
- some mechanism through which possible lateral moves can be discussed between managers. Succession planning does this for 'high potential' staff. How can it happen for others?
- practical development support in making the move as well as mechanisms for rescuing individuals if moves fail.

Organisations are also finding that lateral moves are difficult to bring about unless the efforts of senior management are focused through succession planning or a similar process. It is very difficult indeed for individuals to transfer across functional or

organisational boundaries without management support. Lateral moves need to be carefully judged to give the right degree of learning without too high a risk of negative impact on the business or personal failure.

3.7 Assessment and information

'We know who our high potential staff are'

In managing careers, organisations need a view not just of what individuals are good at now (performance), but what they might be able to do in future (potential).

The issue of potential appraisal is a most difficult one and, again, has been the subject of debate within the Career Development Forum series. Some of the learning points to emerge from this debate include:

- the early identification of 'ultimate potential' (*ie* potential for a destination grade level) was never valid and has largely been dropped
- a 'step by step' approach is often more realistic, in which 'high potential' is recognised from high performance plus the expected ability to progress a significant step further (*eg* looking for senior management potential in individuals already performing well in management jobs)
- thinking about potential in terms of direction/type of role as well as in terms of hierarchical level
- acknowledging that some people do not live up to their early promise and others blossom later, and reflecting this by adjusting their career development accordingly
- examining any contradictions in potential assessment by looking at how potential has been viewed over time and in different job roles. Has the person changed, or is it something about who is doing the assessing?
- not treating any scored assessment of potential as 'scientific' data
- assisting managers in assessing potential by using clear criteria, such as simple competence frameworks
- making sparing use of assessment centres at key career transition points, and being careful about the 'shelf-life' of this information
- adopting an open approach to potential assessment and giving individuals feedback. This helps individuals deal with the increasing amount of assessment data they receive.

The context in which assessments are generated has also changed substantially. In the past, potential appraisal was usually a secret box or two tacked on the end of the performance appraisal form. Career potential and aspirations may still be part

of the performance review but, where performance pay has been implemented, this becomes difficult. As one participant put it:

> *'Our performance reviews have been highjacked by pay. Somewhere along the line the career bit has gone missing.'*

For this reason separate career or development reviews are becoming more common. The traditional boss-subordinate appraisal has also been augmented by the use of assessment or development centres. Most recently, peer and 360 degree feedback are also used to influence career and development plans. There is a danger here that individuals feel bombarded by assessment data.

There certainly is a desire in organisations to use more objective information, including better performance and potential assessments, in career management. However, organisations which are awash with data do not necessarily have better information.

Some succession planning systems have shown how simple, but consistent, information held on a computer and presented to managers taking decisions about individuals can be helpful. However, to achieve this for the larger populations of individuals about whom managers take career decisions is much more difficult.

Some of the issues in computerising development information include:

- problems resulting from the fragmentation of personnel records in decentralised organisations, which limits even the most basic transfer of data across the organisation
- the unwieldy nature of data on skills and competences
- the danger that once assessment ratings are on a machine they attain a spurious appearance of 'fact' not 'judgement'

This difficulty in data handling is another pressure towards self-development (see Chapter 4). Perhaps individuals are better placed to maintain their own development database.

3.8 Links with training and development

This paper is not intended to address current issues in training — a very wide topic in its own right. However, changing views of personal and skill development are very much connected with some of the changes in careers and career management processes outlined so far.

As job groups and career paths have become more fragmented and diverse, so 'blanket' training programmes seem less

appropriate. The shift to more tailored training also aligns with other changes in perspective:

- the desire for training to be of immediate relevance to the work of the employee
- an appreciation of varied individual learning styles
- seeing development as part of the wider search for continuous quality improvement rather than only taking place at discrete 'courses'
- an emphasis on 'action' learning in diverse forms but, particularly, in the use of project working, secondments and assignments as learning experiences.

Those of cynical disposition can also argue that reducing standard courses in favour of more tailored training does make it easier to cut the training function when budget savings are called for.

However, the shift to tailored development makes difficult demands. Several of these mirror the difficulties in managing 'tailored careers':

- As structures for delivering training become looser, so the conceptual framework linking skills and activities needs to become stronger, so that individuals and their managers can target training effectively.
- Blanket training provided a safety net at certain transition points (*eg* on entering management for the first time). Some companies strongly believe that a few key training programmes should be retained for this very reason.
- Tailored and action centred learning demands a degree of reflection on the part of individuals and their managers which is, in itself, a demanding skill.
- Although there is a desire to use work assignments developmentally, managers find this difficult to achieve if the short-term performance imperative is too strong. This mirrors the problems referred to above in terms of facilitating lateral career movement.

4. The Shift to Self-development

In parallel with these adaptations of older approaches to career management, a newer range of initiatives are aimed at encouraging employees to take charge of their own career and skill development. Such approaches can be very diverse, and different organisations will make different choices (Jackson, 1990). The kinds of initiatives we are talking about typically include:

- development centres and career workshops
- personal development plans
- resource centres and open learning facilities
- a wider range of developmental experience at work
- open internal job advertisement.

In this chapter we look more closely at the concept of employee 'self-development': why it is being advocated, how employers can translate the concept into reality, and some of the wider cultural issues raised by this shift.

As with many fashionable ideas, the term 'self-development' is being used with many different meanings, so we had better start by being clear what we will take it to mean here. Its central notion is that employees (and indeed the population at large) should take control of their own development. Development is something far wider than education and training. It embraces the skills and personal development resulting from all our experiences at work. We might, therefore, define self-development as an approach to employee development which assumes individuals will:

- learn about themselves
- take charge of their own learning
- plan and manage their own careers.

4.1 Why self-development?

Employees in an increasing number of major organisations are being told quite explicitly that they should think of themselves as managing their own careers. In many companies they are also

being told to take a more proactive role in planning their own skill development. But why are they being told this?

'You need to manage your own career now'

In Chapter 2 we examined some of the general pressures on the concept of the 'career', leading to a breakdown of the old career 'deal' and hypothesising a new deal in which ensuring employability becomes more important. Under these circumstances, it seems appropriate to encourage employees to think about planning for their own employability, whether inside their current organisation or elsewhere. To do this they need to manage their own careers and skill development.

A related but rather more positive argument, is that the need for more flexibility in employees and the internal labour market of the organisation, is best served by a workforce alert to continuous learning. A self-developing workforce is more likely to be able to deal with frequent changes in job or job content.

The concept of personal development is linked by some to organisational development. The 'learning organisation' is perceived as being staffed by a workforce at ease with self-development (Pedler *et al.*, 1988). In its more radical forms, the 'learning organisation' is looking for employees who will transform the organisation as a result of their own development and in ways that cannot be anticipated in advance.

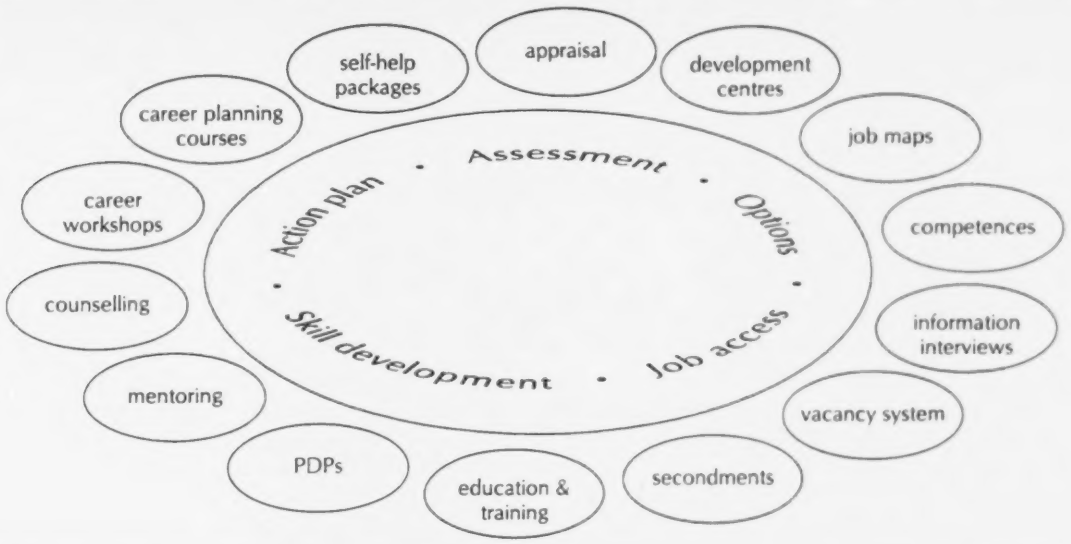
Other pressures stem from more parochial changes in the HR function. In many large organisations, the HR function has devolved and fragmented, and the old processes for managing careers and providing skills training have broken down. Self-development through simply passing the buck to the employee might be seen as both cheap and requiring less formal support. This assumption, that effective self-development requires little support from the employer, is not borne out by practical experience.

Finally, as with any trend in HRM, there is the 'gizmo' factor. Some companies will espouse self-development just because it seems to be in vogue. The danger here is that they have no clear idea of where they are really going and, therefore, no way of knowing whether the initiatives they take are effective.

4.2 Ends and means in self-development

For an organisation seeking to encourage self-development, there seems a baffling array of HR and management techniques which can be called into play. The model shown in Figure 4.1 attempts to simplify these choices by showing the relatively few 'ends' to which all these 'means' contribute.

Fig 4.1 Ends and means in employee development



Self-developing employees need to be able to do five things (as shown in the inner ring of the diagram):

- to assess their skills, knowledge and experience, and to understand their strengths and weaknesses
- to understand current and future job options inside their organisation and in the labour market outside, and what skills these options require
- to formulate an action plan for their own career and skill development, and to modify this over time in the light of changing circumstances
- to access the job market
- to access opportunities for skill development in their current job, and through other work experiences, education and training.

All the processes shown round the outer circle are aimed at facilitating one or more of these five outcomes, and these relationships are — albeit loosely — shown in the diagram.

4.3 Assessment

Assessment has traditionally been the province of appraisal systems and these remain the main source of feedback for most employees. However, there is a tension between using appraisal as the primary vehicle for encouraging development if it is also being used to fix reward. Some employees benefit from a chance to consider their skills in more depth at a development centre. These can be very useful as long as they also permit some action planning and can be followed up (Jackson and Yeates, 1993).

Other approaches to self-development, such as career workshops, are often stronger on personal action planning but rather weak on assessment (Jackson, 1990). There is a need for higher quality self-assessment instruments that individuals could use to think seriously about their skills and attributes, without an occupational psychologist on hand.

4.4 Job and career options

Much less effort has gone into helping employees understand their job options, partly because organisations often do not have a clear idea of career paths. The old paths, often functional, now make less sense. Organisations need to be thinking about new ways of describing realistic career paths for the future. Simply telling employees 'there are no career paths' is both untrue and unhelpful. Employees also need to have access to general information about the future of the organisation in order to position themselves sensibly. This is rarely available at the present time.

By contrast, there has been an epidemic of competence analysis to describe jobs or job groups in terms of the skills they require. This can be very helpful as long as such frameworks are clear, oriented to the future and widely disseminated to employees.

4.5 Action planning

Action planning is an expected part of self-development, and the Personal Development Plan (or PDP) is often seen as the embodiment of such a plan (Tamkin *et al.*, 1995). Again, appraisal is sometimes seen as resulting in a PDP, but rarely presents the opportunity for lengthy reflection. Career workshops (or career planning courses) are an opportunity to create an action plan away from the job and, like development centres, are often a positive experience. However, it can be very resource intensive to put many employees through such events. Self-help materials (books and computer packages) can also assist personal action planning (Hirsh and Jackson, 1994), but many individuals will also benefit from someone to talk to about their thoughts. Setting up processes to facilitate such peer support remains a challenge in many organisations.

4.6 Job and skill access

None of these three building blocks of self-development will have any real impact, if individuals cannot take action in the real world by acquiring skills and accessing jobs. Following up PDPs, or the outcomes of a workshop or development centre, is often the weak link in the chain. The standard solution is that individuals should share their plans with their line managers, who will help them to take action. This will not always work,

and individuals often need others to help them. Counselling and mentoring can complement the role of the line manager, and mentors can help by acting as coaches as well as advisers. People in the HR function can also offer valuable support, provided they can be relied upon to respect confidential information.

The method by which individuals can access learning opportunities is rarely clear. If they want specific training, who do they ask? Learning resource centres, containing a range of training materials and often career planning information as well, seem a useful step. We need to know more about how individuals make use of such a facility. Will the company support individuals in further education? Is there any mechanism for obtaining experience through secondments, job swaps, shadowing, project working *etc.*? If these activities really are important, then employees need to have a clear understanding of how they should go about making use of them.

Last but certainly not least, effective self-development requires an open internal job market. More organisations do now claim to advertise posts internally, although employees nearly always say these processes are partial. The decentralisation of large organisations has set up new barriers to job movement between business streams and units, which can be even more frustrating for employees than the old barriers between functions. If employees cannot find out what job opportunities are coming up and apply for them on merit, then they will quickly become very cynical about self-development.

4.7 Information gaps

So, as we see, there is much to do and much that can be done to move self-development from rhetoric to reality. Organisations are putting a great deal of effort into some areas (such as competence analysis, development centres and resource centres). They need to pay more attention to:

- information on the future of the business and career paths
- providing employees with someone who can help them plan and access development if their line manager does not
- ensuring that the internal labour market operates as freely and fairly as possible
- explaining to all employees, and their managers, what processes exist to help them develop, and how they link together.

4.8 Implementing self-development

'You must now all develop yourselves'

Implementing a self-development approach is quite problematic. Self-development typically requires a range of initiatives which,

by definition, cannot be forced on employees. Self-development strategies do not have to be implemented as a 'big bang'. Some of the best results have been achieved through a series of initiatives over time, each carefully designed and implemented, and each achieving improvement in a particular aspect of development or a particular part of the business (Jackson, 1990). It can be helpful to start with an 'audit' of processes to find out which aspects of development need urgent attention and which can wait. Approaches to clarifying and implementing career development strategy are discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

4.9 Major cultural change

Neither the term 'self-development' nor the activities involved appear very revolutionary. However, the ease with which these terms slip into our language should not deceive us. It is important to realise that some of the deep seated assumptions which lie behind employee self-development represent very significant cultural change for organisations in the UK.

The UK has a long history of believing that only some people can learn and develop. 'High flyers' have traditionally been young, white, well qualified, middle class and male. Self-development is essentially universal and rests on the assumption that all workers are learners, that all adults are capable of taking responsibility for their own development, and that access to jobs will be on the basis of relevant skills.

The UK also has a tradition of rule-based personnel management and rather rigid approaches to job design, careers and training. Self-developing individuals will seek to align their development to their own individual aspirations, including their activities and commitments outside work. They will then expect their organisations to be able to discuss these very individual plans and show flexibility in their response.

Self-development raises many issues of ownership and control as the organisation passes responsibility for career and development to the individual. It is then up to the individual to take up opportunities which the organisation may offer to facilitate development. Some organisations find this uncomfortable. For example, some organisations seek to make producing a PDP compulsory — surely a contradiction in terms (Tamkin *et al.*, 1995). Some organisations do not respect the confidentiality of information produced in self-development activities (*eg* development centres). They regard it as in some way belonging to the organisation, although produced by an individual for their own use (Jackson and Yeates, 1993).

Self-development is a medium term strategy which requires the organisation to invest in its employees and allow them to learn through varied work experience. This can create tensions with the short-term performance culture prevalent in some UK

organisations, which encourages managers to keep high performers in their present jobs (see Chapter 7).

There are underlying differences in the way organisations expect the business benefits of self-development to come about. Some look for a direct gain through supporting those aspects of employee development which are in line with explicit business goals or skill needs. Other organisations are looking for less specific gains through a culture change which results in all employees thinking of themselves as learners. This is more allied to the ideas of continuous improvement and the 'learning organisation'.

Self-development is not a 'gizmo'. It is a major change in the way we approach the relationship between the employer and the employed. Only those organisations which approach it with energy and integrity will reap the potential rewards it offers.

5. Roles and Responsibilities in Career Development

In the previous two chapters we have looked at how organisations are changing their approaches to career management and development, and particularly at how they are encouraging employees to take more responsibility for their own careers and development.

We have seen that individuals cannot really manage their own careers and development without information and support. Most organisations also still seem to feel the need for some 'career management' processes driven from a clear organisational perspective, even if only to act as some kind of safety net for some particular kinds of development for particular workforce groups (especially managers).

In this chapter we look at some of those with responsibility for facilitating the career development of employees and at how their roles may be shifting.

5.1 Out from the centre

Career development is an area in which policy seems to lose all meaning if it is too remote from practice. Policies about development easily become mere rhetoric — 'we seek to develop the potential of all our employees'.

As large organisations have fragmented, they have often simply split responsibility for career development according to workforce groups.

Responsibility for senior management careers and the 'fast track' usually remains at the corporate centre if there is one. The population covered by the corporate succession and development process has generally been shrinking, as more management development is handled by business streams. Some other aspects of management development (*eg* assessment centres, management programmes) may be corporate, but are not always so.

Graduate entry schemes, which often started as corporate, have swung between centralised and decentralised approaches. A decentralised approach allows development which meets the needs of particular parts of the business. However, it can make

deployment more inflexible in the early years, limit skill acquisition, and weaken the company image in the graduate market place. A 'collegiate' approach seems to be growing in popularity, whereby graduate recruitment and early career development is a shared enterprise between different parts of the organisation, coming together as partners.

Certain professional groups may also be handled corporately, especially where their professional bodies specify initial and continued professional development. However, for most other employees the corporate careers policy is often only a vague one of being broadly in favour of development, but specifying little in the way of processes.

5.2 Leaning on the line

'Line managers have prime responsibility for the career development of their staff'

The accepted wisdom is that, as career management moves out from the corporate centre, so it also moves from the HR or personnel function to the line. The HR function may design career development processes, but no longer 'posts' people to jobs. Line managers take career decisions, so they implement the processes of assessment, career discussion and job filling.

Broader research on the role of line managers in personnel management has shown that the simple rhetoric of 'passing it to the line' is often resisted in practice — and for good reason (Bevan and Hayday, 1994).

The role of line managers in career management proved another key issue for the IES Career Development Forum participants and stimulated lively debate. The discussion about line managers had an interesting pattern. It started with the participants — mainly HR people — taking the moral high ground and seeing the line as somewhat unhelpful when it came to the career development of their staff. However, once we looked in more detail at what line managers were being asked to do in business terms, this view shifted. It seems quite consistent to hold line managers accountable for the performance and short-term development of their staff. Whether they are well positioned to take responsibility for the medium term career development of their staff is another matter. It is the longer term nature of career development which makes it particularly problematic for line managers in today's short term climate (see Chapter 7).

Some of the factors which inhibit line managers in facilitating career development include:

- the conflict they perceive between their short term business targets and the actions required to develop their staff for the longer term

- lack of confidence and skill in discussing career development with individuals
- the likelihood that no self-respecting employee is really going to tell their boss all their career aspirations
- lack of knowledge about business direction or job opportunities elsewhere in the business
- the short period of time for which boss/subordinate relationships may last
- mixed personal response to the rapid development or high potential of their subordinates — some finding this satisfying and others very threatening.

The consensus of the Forum participants was that line managers should be expected to play a part in career management but that we must be realistic about what they will deliver. Getting the line to act positively in this area can be improved by:

- skills training in counselling and mentoring
- giving better information to line managers on careers in and the skill needs of, other work areas
- providing clear contact points for further advice
- allowing managers the time in their jobs to take on this role
- involving them in the design of policy and process
- designing the role of the line into particular initiatives.

On this last point, some companies have designed career interventions (*eg* development centres) with the line manager in mind. It is clear from the start how line managers will be briefed on the event their subordinates will attend, at what points they will receive feedback, and what they are expected to do with the employee afterwards. This contrasts sharply with the situation where managers are not told anything about a career intervention, but are expected to work with its outputs.

5.3 Other players

Organisations and their employees have found a number of other ways of providing support to career development. These meet varied needs for encouragement, a confidential ear, information on opportunities, access to training or developmental activities, coaching and so on.

Functional career ownership

This offers the possibility that an individual's career may be the responsibility of their 'home' function, even if they are working in another. The responsibility usually rests with senior managers in that function. It provides a longer term career direction and

safeguards professional development. It can also facilitate lateral movement within the function but across business areas. It does not preclude career periods spent in other functions. It works well in areas like finance or personnel where staff are typically scattered throughout the business. Some international businesses use the concept of 'home country' or 'business stream' in a similar way. It clarifies which part of the business is accountable for the person when their current job assignment ends. As we move towards more 'work assignments' rather than 'posts', the concept of career ownership as separate from the immediate 'boss' (if we still have one) will grow in importance.

Personnel managers

Unit personnel managers are one of the most natural sources of support for career development. They are close at hand. They understand the company processes. They have a better knowledge than most of varied career options and skill requirements. They should be well placed to advise on training and development options. They are often perceived as taking an interest in the perspective of the individual. They should have networks of both managers and other personnel managers within the business who can be tapped for information and advice.

With the current emphasis on line management's responsibility for staff development, there is a danger of devaluing the contribution which personnel managers can make. The personnel function also needs to value the trust placed in it by individuals and be scrupulous in dealing with confidential information.

Succession planners and scheme co-ordinators

A very particular form of support is provided by those normally, but not always, in the personnel function, who have accountability for succession planning or for special development schemes and programmes. It is often part of their role to meet regularly with the individuals covered by such plans or schemes. This gives them access to feedback on how the individuals concerned perceive their development and aspirations. Usually, there is also regular contact with the managers of these individuals and access to their perspective. Many problems can be smoothed out by a skilful use of this role. Succession planners can acquire an extensive and subtle understanding of both evolving business needs and the strengths and weaknesses of key individuals. It is a role which offers limitless scope for influencing career outcomes if the trust of the varied parties is obtained.

Mentors

Mentoring is an attractive idea: the use of someone older or more experienced to advise and coach someone younger or less experienced, and to help them develop their career (see Clutterbuck and Wynne, 1994 for more information). Mentoring 'schemes' have proved quite difficult because arranging a fruitful mentoring relationship is rather like arranging a marriage. Some companies assume mentors have to be quite senior to have the required understanding and influence. Some have adopted mentors who are much closer in age and experience; for example using graduates a few years in, to mentor new entrants. The latter are well placed to offer friendly support but perhaps can have less direct influence on career. Organisations and individuals have choices about how mentoring is organised and delivered, using different types of mentors for different purposes (Jackson, 1993).

Counsellors

One to one career counselling is well established but normally reserved for individuals with a career 'problem', or in outplacement. Organisations that have used counselling have learned from it in designing other less intensive interventions such as development centres or career workshops.

Learning sets

As action learning and project assignments have become more common forms of development, so the 'learning set' seems to be growing in popularity. The idea is of establishing/bringing together a group of people who will discuss and support each other's development, often through regular meetings. Learning sets have also been used in organisations to follow on from a development centre or training programme, as a way of helping individuals who have got to know and trust each other to continue supporting each other's development.

Computers

When all else fails you can always talk to a computer. Computer based systems for helping individuals through aspects of self-assessment and career planning have been around for some years and will probably be more widely used in the future.

At the present time, most computer systems used for career planning are no more than computerised versions of the self-assessment exercises contained in many self-help career books. They do not become any more reliable or valid just because they are computer-based (see Jackson, 1990 for a fuller discussion of the issues involved in the use of computer-based systems). However, experience does suggest that these systems are

popular with users, and it should be easier to keep information up to date on computer assisted careers guidance systems.

5.4 Providing alternatives

In their haste to escape from the promises of the past, some organisations are using self-development as a way of evading their real responsibility — not just for their employees, but for the medium term survival of their own enterprise. Others are loading more of that responsibility onto their line managers than they can reasonably carry.

The whole point about career development is that it comes about as a result of varied partnerships, shared views of direction and shared risks. Many people in organisations can help others to develop in line with their own aspirations and/or to meet specific business needs. Others can help work through the tensions and compromises required between organisations and individuals.

Individuals need to feel free to use a variety of other people to help them. Some of the most important, of course, are likely to be outside work altogether. Organisations should not be too concerned to prescribe who offers support to whom. The minimum tangible goal should be that every employee should feel there is someone with whom they can have a proper dialogue, if they wish, about their career and development. And if they cannot do this with their boss, is there another option?

The goal, therefore, is to establish a network of provision — ideally an integrated series of activities with a common framework, so that wherever individuals start, it is easy for them to find out where to go next.

6. Developing a Strategy for Careers

A key reason for writing this report is our perception that, at the present time, both organisations and individuals are in real difficulty when it comes to thinking about careers. They are confused about what a career involves and, as we have outlined in the previous chapters, both parties are having to rethink how the whole concept of a career will work in the future. From an organisation's point of view this means recognising that old style 'cradle to grave' careers are a thing of the past and that a strategy for managing and developing careers that has been taken for granted by employees and employers, will no longer work.

6.1 Why organisations need a strategy for careers

One response to the changes that are taking place is to decide to do nothing. This implies that someone somewhere is taking the decision that all the changes taking place in the external world and inside the organisation can be ignored, or are too difficult to deal with at present.

'We are going through a lot of change at the moment. When things settle down a bit, we will look at career development again'

It is a myth (and nobody believes this) that tomorrow or the next day we are going to wake up and discover that life has gone back to normal and all this downsizing, delayering and so on, has just been some temporary aberration. On the other hand, the evidence suggests that few organisations have managed to articulate the reasons for having a career development strategy.

So, why do we need a career development strategy? There are several reasons:

- to help us manage all these changes
- to restore the confidence of employees
- to achieve some coherence in our policies.

In many respects the need for a career development strategy is to answer the down to earth questions that come from line managers and employees (*eg:* Who is responsible for career management now? How do these policies fit together?).

Organisations need a career development strategy, therefore, to clarify the purposes and processes of career management. The

purpose is to make all the processes that affect the development of careers work better for the organisation and its employees. However, there is no one best answer regarding the consistency of such a strategy. The challenge is to achieve business fit.

6.2 Elements of a career development strategy

Even if there is nothing written down in your organisation, we suspect that there will be an implicit view on many of the elements of a career development strategy. We identify five broad elements.

1. People values

By this we mean such things as:

- the nature of the commitment the organisation has towards its people (long-term or short-term)
- whether it treats all people equally, or focuses initiatives on specific groups
- the groups of people it identifies (managers, graduates, mobile people, *etc.*)
- beliefs about who is capable of learning and developing (everyone? young people? graduates?)
- ways of delivering learning and development (through training, job experience, time served, *etc.*)
- process style (open or closed, equity, rule bound).

2. Career paths

These are the particular career paths that exist in the organisation and/or the types of career moves that are encouraged. How does the organisation structure:

- career streams? (generalist and/or specialist streams)
- the balance between internal and external resourcing?

3. Skills required

What skills does the organisation value? Is it:

- people who have specialist or generalist skills?
- skills for people in some jobs or occupations (*eg* managers, accountants)?
- rigid or flexible in the skills it requires for certain jobs?
- using competence frameworks to identify skills needs?

4. Ownership of career development

- Are careers owned centrally or locally or does it vary by job level (*eg* are senior managers centrally owned but others owned locally)?
- Are careers owned by the organisation or the individual?
- What is the role of the line manager in developing careers?

5. Ways of managing careers

In what ways does the organisation manage the following processes?

- Specific programmes for job movement and/or training (*eg* people on the fast track, management development programmes).
- General approaches to training (*eg* use of coaching, project working or more traditional use of training courses).
- Job filling (open advertising of all or some internal vacancies, mentoring, networking).
- Assessment of people (*eg* through appraisal, in assessment centres, *etc.*).
- Allocating resources for development (*eg* decide locally or centrally, employee entitlement — days a year, individual budget).

6.3 The focus of current strategies

It is clear that there are many different things a strategy can say something about, but what kinds of strategies do we really see?

In the past, most organisations' strategies were about career paths and formal processes. For instance, many organisations would have policies for people who entered the organisation by a particular route, (*eg* as graduates or on a high flyer scheme), and for particular processes (such as succession planning and promotion).

It was also clear that, if somebody was considered to have a career, it was owned by the organisation. Careers of senior people would be owned at the corporate centre and of more junior people either at a local level or by their function.

While such strategies may have had their weaknesses (they excluded many staff and might be seen as divisive as a result), they were at least clear and the processes could be said to match the structure and people values that organisations were espousing at that time.

By way of a contrast, many of the new strategies that organisations are talking about say a lot about people values and ownership of career development but very little about career paths (have they disappeared?), skill requirements (but they are changing), or ways careers will be managed in the future (perhaps because the organisation is itself uncertain about its future structure and consequently the career paths and processes that will exist).

6.4 How to approach developing a strategy

The first stage in developing a strategy is to be clear where your organisation is starting from. Is it:

- **Blank sheet of paper** — the situation when existing policy is not formally written down anywhere. This is a situation that typically arises when senior managers have complained to the personnel director because their staff have been telling them that, as a result of all the changes taking place, nobody knows what they should be doing about career development.
- **Review of HR processes** — the organisation is reviewing policy and processes. Current practice seems to be breaking down because of the way the organisation has changed.
- **Problem-driven** — a problem with a particular staff group (*eg* high turnover of graduate recruits) or a process (*eg* succession planning is not delivering suitably qualified people for senior management positions).
- **Evolving current processes** — a few years ago the organisation started running career workshops for young managers. Now they want advice on training, and graduate recruits want to go to the workshop when they complete their training programme.

In practice, an organisation may well be influenced by more than one of these reasons in its decision to review its strategy for career development. However, the predominant reason for wanting to review a strategy is also likely to influence the approach that an organisation will take. Possible approaches that organisations might adopt can be labelled:

- **'Big bang'** — A major review being conducted with a high internal profile. May be part of a general review of HR processes that is being conducted on an organisation-wide basis.
- **'Small bang'** — Setting up new systems in one part of the organisation, or several linked initiatives for a particular group of staff (*eg* a new graduate training programme).
- **'Quick fix'** — Sorting out a problem quickly. May be crisis management for a particular group of staff or reworking a process that is no longer working as intended.

- **'Stealth'** — When action is being taken that has not necessarily been sanctioned at higher levels. May involve working with a friendly line manager who is keen to do something practical for his/her staff.

The approach that organisations take will be both a response to where they are starting from and influenced by their culture. A high profile review can be a high risk strategy if the organisation is not fully committed to it. Many aspects of career development only have a pay-off in the medium to long term. In practice, a successful strategy is likely to be one that is coherent and that evolves over time. This suggests it is responding to changing circumstances in both the internal and external labour markets.

6.5 Objectives for career development strategy

There are a wide range of initiatives that organisations can offer if they are concerned about career development. However, these initiatives are driven towards a limited number of objectives. These have already been outlined in relation to self-development (see Figure 4.1):

- **Assessment** — activities that aim to provide the individual or the organisation with the opportunity to learn about the individual's strengths and weaknesses, their interests, *etc.*
- **Career options** — activities that aim to assist individuals and their managers understand current and future career and job options
- **Action planning** — activities that encourage planning for the future by the individual and/or the organisation
- **Skill development** — activities to encourage and deliver skill development
- **Vacancy filling** — activities designed to manage the internal labour market in line with business needs and culture.

6.6 Developing a strategy

'I want a Board paper on career strategy . . . next week'

Our experience is that many organisations think that a strategy for careers can be developed without research. When organisations do not understand how careers work in their own organisations, it is not surprising that they come up with plans or launch initiatives that do not really meet the needs of either the organisation or its employees. No two organisations are the same, so any strategy for careers needs to be tailored to the particular circumstances of the organisation and its employees. As in other areas of HR, organisations are frequently littered with remains of career development initiatives that have been developed at great expense but did not work, because they were not addressing the real needs of the organisation or the people who work for it.

However, a relatively small amount of research is likely to give a sense of direction to career strategy and help the organisation draw up priorities. Frequently this research will also help market the strategy, because people are more likely to become committed to a strategy that has been developed in a collaborative way. It also means that any strategy is much more likely to be coherent.

What sort of things need to be done?

There are a number of things that might be necessary to do if an organisation wishes to adopt a more reflective approach to developing a strategy for careers. These include:

- **Mapping career paths**. This includes both qualitative and quantitative aspects. On the qualitative side it means understanding what the key career transitions are in the organisation. For example, at what stage in their careers do people enter management, or when should cross-functional career moves be made? On the quantitative side, it means being able to answer questions about staff numbers. For example, are we recruiting enough graduates to meet our needs in five years time?
- **Understanding employee concerns.** Employees are not always concerned about the same issues which their organisation thinks they are. Some organisations use staff attitude surveys to access employees' concerns. However, it may also be useful to consider conducting interviews with some members of staff. These activities can be used to find out what ideas staff themselves may have about how career development might be improved and will help in setting priorities for action.
- **Identify problem areas.** If action is being taken about a real problem, it is probably more likely to be successful. Any initiative has to start somewhere and it usually helps if it aims to tackle a problem that people are concerned about.
- **Knowing how processes work in practice.** Organisations nearly all have standards for their processes, but far fewer know whether the things that are supposed to be carried out actually are. As organisations decentralise, responsibility for carrying out many activities has been passed to the line managers. Whilst this has a number of advantages, it frequently means that no one knows whether appraisals are carried out as frequently, or in the manner, intended. Talking to line managers and staff about what actually happens in practice is vital, if an organisation is not to fool itself that it has a set of programmes in place, when in reality many of the processes are being little used or distorted. From a career management perspective, key processes include how vacancies are filled and promotions are handled, as well as

procedures for identifying and delivering training and development.

- **Learning about current innovations.** We are constantly surprised by how frequently people at the centre of organisations are unaware of local initiatives that have been developed, and may be working successfully. Perhaps, recognising that organisations are splintering as they restructure, we should not be so surprised that more and more initiatives are launched at a local level. However, it poses a real challenge to those (perhaps at the centre) with responsibility for co-ordinating what is going on in the organisation.
- **Generating ideas.** It is also useful to include, as part of the research, finding out what other organisations are doing and what staff think would work in your organisation. Sometimes, however, people find it difficult to envisage how some of the possible initiatives would work in practice.

Although many of these activities can be conducted by sending memos or by telephone, our experience suggests that there is no substitute for going out and talking to people face to face. Individuals often suggest practical improvements to policy or practice. Structured surveys of employees and line managers can also make a useful contribution to our understanding.

There can be no guarantee that a strategy developed in this way will be successful, but carrying out research of the kind we have outlined, is likely to mean that any strategy that is developed is more likely to be coherent and to be addressing real issues. These processes are designed to enable an organisation to move from strategic intention to identifying a few key actions that will form the 'plan of action'.

6.7 Implementation

Generating a plan is only the first stage to having a successful strategy in place. Plans have to be implemented and many good plans fall at this hurdle. The issues here are more about tactics. In many ways the issue of tactics for implementing HR plans is no different from launching any other initiative. They need the support of top management, they invariably benefit from the support of key players and for HR activities this includes the consumers/recipients. There is usually a lot to learn from running a successful pilot programme before an initiative is launched more widely.

Assuming that the responsibility for developing the strategy for careers falls to someone working in the HR function, the tactics for gaining the support of top management are likely to vary by the approach that is being taken. An organisation that is taking the 'Big Bang' approach is likely to be involving top management from the start. On the other hand, if 'Stealth' is the

strategy being adopted, being able to show top management something that works is probably going to be vital for long term success.

Many organisations are launching initiatives, ranging from new products to improving customer service, by setting up project teams. Developing a strategy for careers is no different. The advantages of this approach to the development of initiatives in the HR area are that it is one method of ensuring that any initiative is developed to meet the real needs of its customers — the organisation's managers and staff. Using a project group, either in a direct way or indirectly in an advisory capacity, can be particularly useful in getting commitment to the initiative.

While some of us can get it right first time, most of us benefit from practice. This argues for starting small with a pilot programme and learning from the inevitable mistakes, before launching a programme on a larger scale.

Finally, a few key points about implementing strategy in this area:

- **the need for stability and continuity** — initiatives should be kept in place relatively unchanged for long enough to become embedded in organisational practice and for people to understand them fully.
- **the need for proper implementation** — doing a few things well, rather than attempting to deliver too many initiatives and not being able to give them the support they require.
- **the need for co-ordination** — all too often, different HR processes are not designed to fit together. For career development it is particularly important that, as far as possible, different activities use common frameworks so that the output from one activity can be used as input to others.
- **the need for evaluation** — few initiatives are monitored, let alone properly evaluated. This means that we do not know the extent to which most initiatives really influence careers or encourage development.

7. Unresolved Issues and Tensions

In many major employing organisations, approaches to career development are responding to a situation we can best describe as career chaos. Large scale job losses may have wiped out any notion of career for the time being. In others, successive changes in organisational structure and skill requirements have erased career paths. Changes in management structure and the role of personnel have made it difficult to maintain processes for career development or to implement new approaches. There are bright spots where organisations are approaching these challenges with enthusiasm and imagination. A few large companies have kept their nerve and are managing incremental change in career development processes and systems.

For the majority of the workforce, however, the rhetoric of development has never been stronger, and their real hope of a serious chance to develop their potential has not been so bleak for fifty years.

In this report we have tried to map some of the changes going on inside large organisations in the UK. We have tried, where possible, to use the information shared at IES Career Development Forums to highlight positive learning points.

It is easy in the field of career development to keep busy by designing interventions. However, we know that few of these ever really get embedded in our organisations. In this last section we conclude by pulling together some of the challenges for the future. They represent some of the areas in which fundamental thinking and innovation is required.

Just to show that these issues are not the idle fancies of academics, each is couched in terms of a real question that real people in real organisations are asking us today. And we do not have satisfactory answers.

7.1 Why should I bother about development?

The new career deal

We started this paper with a description of the breakdown of the old career deal. Just what is the purpose and position of the new career and development deal?

- Is development now about me (the employee) or is it about you (the employer) and to what degree?
- If it is for the company, then is its purpose to meet foreseeable needs for work activities, business targets and skills? Is it really little more than job-related training with a new name?
- To what extent does the company also expect me, through development, to respond to unforeseen change or bring about unforeseen innovation? Does it really want me to shake things up?
- If I do develop in the way the business wants me to, then what's in it for me? Does 'career' still mean more interesting or more highly paid work activities? Will development in line with your business direction also make me more employable if you make me redundant? What do you mean when you talk about 'paying for skill'?

7.2 Where am I going?

Career direction

It is very difficult to develop without some sense of direction. We no longer expect to know exactly what job we will be doing in five years' time. But we do need some sense — however general — of direction. This problem of direction applies whether we are looking at career management processes owned by the organisation, or career development owned by the individual.

- Surely there must be some career paths in here somewhere!
- I can't find out about job/work opportunities, so how can I plan my development?
- What can you tell me about the future direction of the business which can give me clues about how to position myself for the future?
- Do some of our explicit business goals or critical business activities say something about how someone like me should be developing?
- Is it specialists you want or managers? Is it wise or dangerous for me to broaden my skills base at the expense of the particular technical or functional expertise I currently possess?
- Are there new groups of jobs or activities emerging which I need to fit into? Will my current type of activity still be in the organisation at all in five years' time? Should I be thinking about taking my career outside?
- What do competence frameworks tell me about the organisation's values? Are these just another fad you will

drop or rewrite in a couple of years when fashions change again?

7.3 What will you let me try?

Short versus medium term

Throughout the whole activity of career development, there is constant tension between the short term and the longer term goals of the organisation. Development, as distinct from job training, is inherently an activity with medium to long term pay-offs. Careers last our whole lives long. Most UK organisations, in spite of the vision and mission rhetoric, rarely plan more than a few years ahead — often a year seems like good going. Development is an investment and, like all investments, it is a risk.

- I know I could do a bigger job/a different job but only those on the fast track/people under 40/graduates seem allowed to have a go.
- You say 'lateral moves' are the in thing, but how can I possibly get another department to take me on?
- If I do go for something different I'll be laughed at for every mistake I make and maybe my new boss won't reach his targets for the year. Maybe I won't be let back into my old department either because I let them down by moving.
- I've been studying in my own time and I've completed my MBA. I think that shows my ability and willingness to contribute more to this organisation. What do you think?
- If I do take that project assignment what will happen to me afterwards?

7.4 Will you meet me half way?

The individual and the organisation

Just as fundamental as the tension between the short and longer term, is the tension between individual aspirations and the goals of the organisation. It is easy, especially in the jargon of the 'learning organisation', to assume that individual and organisational goals align. Many of the things organisations have wanted from their employees have made them less rather than more employable.

- If I think a new skill is important to my future will you back me in developing it? If you don't know where the business is going, it may be that I can make a better guess at the direction of skill change in my kind of work than you.

- You ask me to discuss my career plans with my boss. What do I get in return? How do I tell her that I feel I need a change? Who will she tell?
- You don't seem to trust me with your plans, why should I trust you with mine?
- You say you want to encourage new ways of working. All that seems new round here is that people are working even longer hours than before. If I can't or won't work these crazy hours must I say goodbye to career progression?
- If I work with you, but as a freelancer rather than an employee, how do we meet our shared need to keep my skills up to date?
- You say it is my responsibility to plan my career, but how am I expected to find the time or energy to do all this career development, when I have got those work deadlines to meet?

7.5 How will you support my development?

Career development for all

If organisations really intend to take the development of the whole workforce more seriously, then none of our established ways of managing careers provide good models for the future. Mass career development needs radically new methods of delivery. Both 'self-development' and 'line manager support' have been offered as simple suggestions for getting large numbers of employees to undertake career planning and skill development. Both fail without considerable additional support, in the form of both careers guidance activities and in delivery of varied development options.

- I know I'm in a rut but I don't know anything about what kinds of other things I may be able to do in this company. Who can I talk to?
- I don't know what I'm really good at. Appraisal is just a game to fix my bonus. How do I get a view of what skills I should be building on?
- There are some changes I would like to make in my current job. I think they would extend my contribution to the business and be more fun for me. My boss likes things the way they are. What do I do?
- I can see I'm nearing the end of the road in terms of my career here. Am I right? What does the company do about people in this position?
- There is a course at my local college which I feel would enhance my work skills. What is your policy on giving me time off to study, or paying my fees?

Many of these issues are not just relevant to what goes on for the 'employees' of large organisations. They are also vital for those who work in smaller enterprises and as freelance/ subcontractors with employing organisations. They are even more crucial for young people entering work, for all those leaving education, for the self-employed, and for those experiencing redundancy and unemployment. This is particularly so for the last set of issues — how to deliver careers guidance and skill development to the many rather than the few. In that sense, some of our employing organisations should act as laboratories over the coming years, in finding cheaper but still effective means of facilitating the medium term development of the whole workforce.

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CAREERS IN ORGANISATIONS: ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE
W Hirsh, C Jackson, C Jackson
Report 287, 1995.
ISBN 1-85184-213-6

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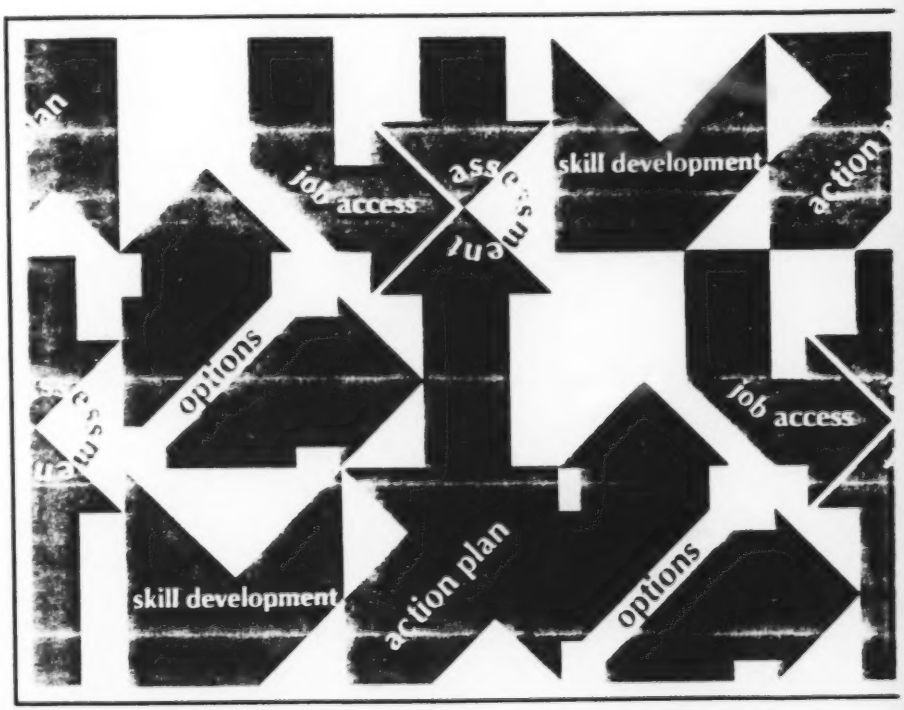

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ISBN 1-85184-213-6